NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
POLITICAL FEATURE NO. 1-2003 DECEMBER 14, 1976
DOUGLAS ROBERTS/CAIRO

THE LEBANON CONFLICT: RELIGION AND THE PALESTINIANS
(PART 2 OF 2)
(VOICED VERSION IN LIBRARY)

ANNCR:

DURING A RECENT VISIT TO BEIRUT, VOA'S DOUGLAS ROBERTS INTERVIEWED TWO RIVAL LEBANESE POLITICIANS...KARIM PAKRADOUNI OF THE RIGHT WING PHALANGE PARTY AND SAMIR SOBH OF THE LEFTIST INDEPENDENT NASSERITES. IN THIS (THE SECOND OF TWO) REPORT(S), ROBERTS EXAMINES LEBANON'S RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS AND THE QUESTION OF PALESTINIAN ACTIVITY IN THE COUNTRY.

VOICE:

ONE OF THE MAJOR LEFTIST DEMANDS THROUGHOUT LEBANON'S NINETEEN MONTH LONG CIVIL WAR WAS FOR AN END TO THE COUNTRY'S POLITICAL CONCESSIONALISM...THAT IS, THE DISTRIBUTION OF POLITICAL POSTS AMONG REPRESENTATIVES OF THE VARIOUS CHRISTIAN AND MOSLEM SECTS IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE A RELIGIOUS POWER BALANCE.

SAMIR SOBH OF THE LEFT WING INDEPENDENT NASSERTIES SAYS THE SYSTEM IN WHICH THE COUNTRY'S PRESIDENT IS A MARONITE CHRISTIAN, THE PREMIER A SUMI MOSLEM, AND SO FORTH, TENDED TO LEAD TO CHRISTIAN DOMINATION GIVING CHRISTIANS PRIVILEGES AT THE EXPENSE OF THE MOSLEM MAJORITY. MISTER SOBH WANTS TO SEE THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIALISM IN LEBANON GEARED TO THE COUNTRY'S SPECIAL CHARACTER AND MOSAIC POPULATION. HE WANTS AN END TO CONCESSIONAL INTERESTS AND HELP FOR THE COUNTRY'S LARGELY MOSLEM POOR PEOPLE THROUGH BALANCED ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT...SOMETHING HE SAYS THE CHRISTIANS OPPOSE.

MISTER SOBH WOULD AGREE TO GUARANTEES TO THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY INCLUDING A CHRISTIAN PRESIDENT. BUT HE SAYS THE CHRISTIANS MUST ACCEPT THE ARAB CHARACTER OF LEBANON.

KARIM PAKRADOUNI OF THE RIGHT WING CHRISTIAN PHALANGE PARTY SAYS LEBANON'S MOSLEMS MUST LEARN TO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES FIRST AS LEBANESE. HE BELIEVES THAT FOR THE TIME BEING AT LEAST THE CONCESSIONAL POLITICAL SYSTEM SHOULD REMAIN IN EFFECT. HE FAVORS LONG TERM DESECULARIZATION BEGINNING WITHIN THE VARIOUS RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND THE PROMOTION OF A TRULY LEBANESE IDENTITY.

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY NEEDS GUARANTEES AND REASSURANCES TO OVERCOME TRADITIONAL FEARS OF MOSLEM DOMINATION, MISTER PAKRADOUNI SAYS, BUT ONCE THOSE FEARS HAVE BEEN DISSIPATED THROUGH A DESECULARIZATION PROCESS THERE WILL NO LONGER BE NEED FOR GUARANTEES. AND HE ENVISAGES A MOSLEM PRESIDENT OF LEBANON AT SOME TIME IN THE FUTURE.

MISTER SOBH AND MISTER PAKRADOUNI DIFFER MOST OF THE ISSUE OF LEBANON'S PALESTINIAN COMMUNITY, INCLUDING THE THOUSANDS OF ARMED GUERRILLAS WHO SIDED WITH THE LEFTIST FACTION DURING THE WAR. MISTER PAKADOUNI IS DISTINCTLY MODERATE AMONG RIGHT WING LEADERS, SOME OF WHOM WANT THE EXPULSION OF PALESTINIANS FROM LEBANON. THE PHALANGE PARTY OFFICIAL DOES NOT ADVOCATE SUCH A DRASTIC STEP. BUT HE DOES WANT PALESTINIAN MILITARY AND POLITICAL POWERS IN THE COUNTRY SEVERELY CURBED. AND HE AGREES WITH RIGHTIST LEADERS WHO WANT THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE IN LEBANON RESOLVED BEFORE DISCUSSIONS AMONG THE LEBANESE THEMSELVES.

MISTER SOBH, THE LEFTIST, WANTS THE OPPOSITE. THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM IS LINKED TO THE OVERALL MIDDLE EAST SITUATION, HE SAYS, AND IT WILL NOT BE QUICKLY RESOLVED. THE LEBANESE PROBLEM SHOULD COME FIRST. THE PALESTINIANS, SAYS MISTER SOBH, ARE NOT IN LEBANON OF THEIR OWN FREE WILL. HE CONCEDES SOME PALESTINIAN INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANESE AFFAIRS BEFORE THE WAR ON THE POLITICAL LEVEL. BUT HE STRONGLY REJECTS RIGHTIST CONTENTIONS THAT PALESTINIAN ACTIVITY IN THE COUNTRY WAS THE ROOT CAUSE OF THE CONFLICT.

BOTH MISTER PAKRADOUNI AND MISTER SOBH SAY THEIR ORGANIZATIONS WILL SUPPORT PRESIDENT ELIAS SARKIS AND COOPERATE WITH THE ARAB LEAGUE PEACE KEEPING FORCES. WHILE THEY HAVE MANY DIFFERENCES AND ARE SEPARATED BY THE BITTERNESS OF MORE THAN A YEAR AND A HALF OF WARFARE, BOTH SEEM WILLING TO DISCUSS THE PROBLEMS IN AN ATTEMPT TO REUNITE LEBANON.

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JS/RTD